ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

THE BLACK PITS OF LUNA

THE MORNING after we got to the Moon we went over to Rutherford. Dad and Mr. Latham - Mr. Latham is the man from the Harriman Trust that Dad came to Luna City to see.

Dad and Mr. Latham had to go anyhow, on business. I got Dad to promise I could go along because it looked like just about my only chance to get out on the surface of the Moon. Luna City is all right, I guess, but I defy you to tell a corridor in Luna City from the sublevels in New York-except that you're light on your feet, of course.

When Dad came into our hotel suite to say we were ready to leave, I was down on the floor, playing mumblety-peg with my kid brother. Mother was lying down and had asked me to keep the runt quiet. She had been dropsick all the way out from Earth and I guess she didn't feel very good. The runt had been fiddling with the lights, switching them from "dusk" to "desert suntan" and back again. I collared him and sat him down on the floor.

Of course, I don't play mumblety-peg any more, but, on the Moon, it's a right good game. The knife practically floats and you can do all kinds of things with it. We made up a lot of new rules.

Dad said, "Switch in plans, my dear. We're leaving for Rutherford right away. Let's pull ourselves together."

Mother said, "Oh, mercy me-I don't think I'm up to it. You and Dickie run along. Baby Darling and I will just spend a quiet day right here."

Baby Darling is the runt.

I could have told her it was the wrong approach. He nearly put my eye out with the knife and said, "Who? What? I'm going too. Let's go!"

Mother said, "Oh, now, Baby Darling-don't cause Mother Dear any trouble, We'll go to the movies, just you and I."

The runt is seven years younger than I am, but don't call him "Baby Darling" if you want to get anything out of him. He started to bawl. "You said I could go!" he yelled.

"No, Baby Darling. I haven't mentioned it to you. I-"

"Daddy said I could go!"

"Richard, did you tell Baby he could go?"

"Why, no, my dear, not that I recall. Perhaps I-"

The kid cut in fast. "You said I could go anywhere Dickie went. You promised me you promised me you promised me." Sometimes you have to hand it to the runt; he had them jawing about who told him what in nothing flat. Anyhow, that is how twenty minutes later, the four of us were up at the rocket port with Mr. Lathani and climbing into the shuttle for Rutherford.

The trip only takes about ten minutes and you don't see much, just a glimpse of the Earth while the rocket is still near Luna City and then not even that, since the atom plants where we were going are all on the back side of the Moon, of course. There were maybe a dozen tourists along and most of them were dropsick as soon as we went into free flight. So was Mother. Some people never will get used to rockets.

But Mother was all right as soon as we grounded and were inside again. Rutherford isn't like Luna City; instead of extending a tube out to the ship, they send a pressurized car out to latch on to the airlock of the rocket, then you jeep back about a mile to the entrance to underground. I liked that and so did the runt. Dad had to go off on business with Mr. Latham, leaving Mother and me and the runt to join up with the party of tourists for the trip through the laboratories.

It was all right but nothing to get excited about. So far as I can see, one atomics plant looks about like another; Rutherford could just as well have been. the main plant outside Chicago. I mean to say everything that is anything is out of sight, covered up, shielded. All you get to see are some dials and instrument boards and people watching them. Remote control stuff, like Oak Ridge. The guide tells you about the experiments going on and they show you some movies - that's all.

I liked our guide. He looked like Tom Jeremy in The Space Troopers. I asked him if he was a spaceman and he looked at me kind of funny and said, no, that he was just a Colonial Services ranger. Then he asked me where I went to school and if I belonged to the Scouts. He said he was scoutmaster of Troop One, Rutherford City,

Moonbat Patrol.

I found out there was just the one patrol-not many scouts on the Moon, I suppose.

Dad and Mr. Latham joined us just as we finished the tour while Mr. Perrin - that's our guide - was announcing the trip outside. "The conducted tour of Rutherford," he said, talking as if it were a transcription, "includes a trip by spacesuit out on the surface of the Moon, without extra charge, to see the Devil's Graveyard and the site of the Great Disaster of 1984. The trip is optional. There is nothing particularly dangerous about it and we've never had any one hurt, but the Commission requires that you sign a separate release for your own safety if you choose to make this trip. The trip takes about one hour. Those preferring to remain behind will find movies and refreshments in the coffee shop."

Dad was rubbing his hands together. "This is for me," he announced. "Mr. Latham, I'm glad we got back in time. I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

"You'll enjoy it," Mr. Latham agreed, "and so will you, Mrs. Logan. I'm tempted to come along myself."

"Why don't you?' Dad asked.

"No, I want to have the papers ready for you and the Director to sign when you get back and before you leave for Luna City."

"Why knock yourself out?" Dad urged him. "If a man's word is no good, his signed contract is no better. You can mail the stuff to me at New York."

Mr. Latham shook his head. "No, really - I've been out on the surface dozens of times. But I'll come along and help you into your spacesuits."

Mother said, "Oh dear," she didn't think she'd better go; she wasn't sure she could stand the thought of being shut up in a spacesuit and besides glaring sunlight always gave her a headache.

Dad said, "Don't be silly, my dear; it's the chance of a lifetime," and Mr. Latham told her that the filters on the helmets kept the light from being glaring. Mother always objects and then gives in. I suppose women just don't have any force of character. Like the night before - earth-night, I mean, Luna City time - she had bought a fancy moonsuit

to wear to dinner in the Earth-View room at the hotel, then she got cold feet. She complained to Dad that she was too plump to dare to dress like that.

Well, she did show an awful lot of skin. Dad said, "Nonsense, my dear. You look ravishing." So she wore it and had a swell time, especially when a pilot tried to pick her up.

It was like that this time. She came along. We went into the outfitting room and I looked around while Mr. Perrin was getting them all herded in and having the releases signed. There was the door to the airlock to the surface at the far end, with a bull's-eye window in it and another one like it in the door beyond. You could peek through and see the surface of the Moon beyond, looking hot and bright and sort of improbable, in spite of the amber glass in the windows. And there was a double row of spacesuits hanging up, looking like empty men. I snooped around until Mr. Perrin got around to our party.

"We can arrange to leave the youngster in the care of the hostess in the coffee shop," he was telling Mother. He reached down and tousled the runt's hair. The runt tried to bite him and he snatched his hand away in a hurry.

"Thank you, Mr. Perkins," Mother said, "I suppose that's best-though perhaps I had better stay behind with him."

"'Perrin' is the name," Mr. Perrin said mildly. "It won't be necessary. The hostess will take good care of him."

Why do adults talk in front of kids as if they couldn't understand English? They should have just shoved him into the coffee shop. By now the runt knew he was being railroaded. He looked around belligerently. "I go, too," he said loudly. "You promised me."

"Now Baby Darling," Mother tried to stop him. "Mother Dear didn't tell you-" But she was just whistling to herself; the runt turned on the sound effects.

"You said I could go where Dickie went; you promised me when I was sick. You promised me you promised me-" and on and on, his voice getting higher and louder all the time.

Mr. Perrin looked embarrassed. Mother said, "Richard, you'll just have to deal with your child. After all, you were the one who promised him."

"Me, dear?" Dad looked surprised. "Anyway, I don't see anything so complicated about it. Suppose we did promise him that he could do what Dickie does-we'll simply take him along; that's all."

Mr. Perrin cleared his throat. "I'm afraid not. I can outfit your older son with a woman's suit; he's tall for his age. But we just don't make any provision for small children."

Well, we were all tangled up in a mess in no time at all. The runt can always get Mother to go running in circles. Mother has the same effect on Dad. He gets red in the face and starts laying down the law to me. It's sort of a chain reaction, with me on the end and nobody to pass it along to. They came out with a very simple solution - I was to stay behind and take care of Baby Darling brat!

"But, Dad, you said-" I started in.

"Never mind!" he cut in. "I won't have this family disrupted in a public squabble. You heard what your mother said."

I was desperate. "Look, Dad," I said, keeping my voice low, "if I go back to Earth without once having put on a spacesuit and set foot on the surface, you'll just have to find another school to send me to. I won't go back to Lawrenceville; I'd be the joke of the whole place."

"We'll settle that when we get home."

"But, Dad, you promised me specifically-"

"That'll be enough out of you, young man. The matter is closed."

Mr. Lathain had been standing near by, taking it in but keeping his mouth shut. At this point he cocked an eyebrow at Dad and said very quietly, "Well, R.J., I thought your word was your bond?"

I wasn't supposed to hear it and nobody else did - a good thing, too, for it doesn't do to let Dad know that you know that he's wrong; it just makes him worse. I changed the subject in a hurry. "Look, Dad, maybe we all can go out. How about that suit over there?" I pointed at a rack that was inside a railing with a locked gate on it. The rack had a couple of dozen suits on it and at the far end, almost out of sight, was a small suit - the boots on it hardly came down to the waist of the suit next to it.

"Huh?" Dad brightened up. "Why, just the thing! Mr. Perrin! Oh, Mr. Perrin-here a minute! I thought you didn't have any small suits,

but here's one that I think will fit."

Dad was fiddling at the latch of the railing gate. Mr. Perrin stopped him. "We can't use that suit, sir."

"Uh? Why not?"

"All the suits inside the railing are private property, not for rent."

"What? Nonsense-Rutherford is a public enterprise. I want that suit for my child."

"Well, you can't have it."

"I'll speak to the Director."

"I'm afraid you'll have to. That suit was specially built for his daughter."

And that's just what they did. Mr. Latham got the Director on the line, Dad talked to him, then the Director talked to Mr. Perrin, then he talked to Dad again. The Director didn't mind lending the suit, not to Dad, anyway, but he wouldn't order Mr. Perrin to take a below-age child outside.

Mr. Perrin was feeling stubborn and I don't blame him, but Dad soothed his feathers down and presently we were all climbing into our suits and getting pressure checks and checking our oxygen supply and switching on our walkie-talkies. Mr. Perrin was calling the roll by radio and reminding us that we were all on the same circuit, so we had better let him do most of the talking and not to make casual remarks or none of us would be able to hear. Then we were in the airlock and he was warning us to stick close together and not try to see how fast we could run or how high we could jump. My heart was rocking around in my chest.

The outer door of the lock opened and we filed out on the face of the Moon. It was just as wonderful as I dreamed it would be, I guess, but I was so excited that I hardly knew it at the time. The glare of the sun was the brightest thing I ever saw and the shadows so inky black you could hardly see into them. You couldn't hear anything but voices over your radio and you could reach down and switch off that.

The pumice was soft and kicked up around our feet like smoke, settling slowly, falling in slow motion. Nothing else moved. It was the deadest place you can imagine.

We stayed on a path, keeping close together for company, except twice when I had to take out after the runt when he found out he could jump twenty feet. I wanted to smack him, but did you ever try to smack anybody wearing a spacesuit? It's no use.

Mr. Perrin told us to halt presently and started his talk. "You are now in the Devil's Graveyard. The twin spires behind you are five thousand feet above the floor of the plain and have never been scaled. The spires, or monuments, have been named for apocryphal or mythological characters because of the fancied resemblance of this fantastic scene to a giant cemetery. Beelzebub, Thor, Siva, Cain, Set-" He pointed around us. "Lunologists are not agreed as to the origin of the strange shapes. Some claim to see indications of the action of air and water as well as volcanic action. If so, these spires must have been standing for an unthinkably long period, for today, as you see, the Moon-" It was the same sort of stuff you can read any month in Spaceways Magazine, only we were seeing it and that makes a difference, let me tell you.

The spires reminded me a bit of the rocks below the lodge in the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs when we went there last summer, only these spires were lots bigger and, instead of blue sky, there was just blackness and hard, sharp stars overhead. Spooky.

Another ranger bad come with us, with a camera. Mr. Perrin tried to say something else, but the runt had started yapping away and I had to switch off his radio before anybody could hear anything. I kept it switched off until Mr. Perrin finished talking.

He wanted us to line up for a picture with the spires and the black sky behind us for a background. "Push your faces forward in your helmets so that your features will show. Everybody look pretty. There!" he added as the other guy snapped the shot. "Prints will be ready when you return, at ten dollars a copy."

I thought it over. I certainly needed one for my room at school and I wanted one to give to - anyhow, I needed another one. I had eighteen bucks left from my birthday money; I could sweet-talk Mother for the balance. So I ordered two of them.

We climbed a long rise and suddenly we were staring out across the crater, the disaster crater, all that was left of the first laboratory. It stretched away from us, twenty miles across, with the floor covered with shiny, bubbly green glass instead of pumice. There was a monument. I read it:

HERE ABOUT YOU ARE THE MORTAL REMAINS OF

Kurt Schaeffer

Maurice Feinstein

Thomas Dooley

Hazel Hayakawa

Cl. Washington Slappey

Sam Houston Adams

WHO DIED FOR THE TRUTH THAT MAKES MEN FREE

On the Eleventh Day of August 1984

I felt sort of funny and backed away and went to listen to Mr. Perrin. Dad and some of the other men were asking him questions. "They don't know exactly," he was saying. "Nothing was left. Now we telemeter all the data back to Luna City, as it comes off the instruments, but that was before the line-of-sight relays were set up."

"What would have happened," some man asked, "if this blast had gone off on Earth?"

"I'd hate to try to tell you-but that's why they put the lab here, back of the Moon." He glanced at his watch. "Time to leave, everybody." They were milling around, heading back down toward the path, when Mother screamed.

"Baby! Where's Baby Darling?"

I was startled but I wasn't scared, not yet. The runt is always running around, first here and then there, but he doesn't go far away, because he always wants to have somebody to yap to.

My father had one arm around Mother; he signaled to me with the other. "Dick," he snapped, his voice sharp in my earphones, "what have you done with your brother?'

"Me?" I said. "Don't look at me-the last I saw Mother had him by

the hand, walking up the hill here."

"Don't stall around, Dick. Mother sat down to rest when we got here and sent him to you."

"Well, if she did, he never showed up." At that, Mother started to scream in earnest. Everybody had been listening, of course-they had to; there was just the one radio circuit. Mr. Perrin stepped up and switched off Mother's talkie, making a sudden silence.

"Take care of your wife, Mr. Logan," he ordered, then added, "When did you see your child last?"

Dad couldn't help him any; when they tried switching Mother back into the hook-up, they switched her right off again. She couldn't help and she deafened us. Mr. Perrin addressed the rest of us. "Has anyone seen the small child we had with us? Don't answer unless you have something to contribute. Did anyone see him wander away?"

Nobody had. I figured he probably ducked out when everybody was looking at the crater and had their backs to him. I told Mr. Perrin so. "Seems likely," he agreed. "Attention, everybody! I'm going to search for the child. Stay right where you are. Don't move away from this spot. I won't be gone more than ten minutes."

"Why don't we all go?" somebody wanted to know.

"Because," said Mr. Perrin, "right now I've - only got one lost. I don't want to make it a dozen." Then he left, taking big easy lopes that covered fifty feet at a step.

Dad started to take out after him, then thought better of it, for Mother suddenly keeled over, collapsing at the knees and floating gently to the ground. Everybody started talking at once. Some idiot wanted to take her helmet off, but Dad isn't crazy. I switched off my radio so I could hear myself think and started looking around, not leaving the crowd but standing up on the lip of the crater and trying to see as much as I could.

I was looking back the way we had come; there was no sense in looking at the crater-if he had been in there he would have shown up like a fly on a plate.

Outside the crater was different; you could have hidden a regiment within a block of us, rocks standing up every which way, boulders big as houses with blow holes all through them, spires,

gulleys-it was a mess. I could see Mr. Perrin every now and then, casting around like a dog after a rabbit, and making plenty of time. He was practically flying. When he came to a big boulder he would jump right over it, leveling off face down at the top of his jump, so he could see better.

Then he was heading back toward us and I switched my radio back on. There was still a lot of talk. Somebody was saying, "We've got to find him before sundown," and somebody else answered, "Don't be silly; the sun won't be down for a week. It's his air supply, I tell you. These suits are only good for four hours." The first voice said, "Oh!" then added softly, "like a fish out of water-" It was then I got scared.

A woman's voice, sounding kind of choked, said, "The poor, poor darling! We've got to find him before he suffocates," and my father's voice cut in sharply, "Shut up talking that way!" I could hear somebody sobbing. It might have been Mother.

Mr. Perrin was almost up to us and he cut in, "Silence everybody! I've got to call the base," and he added urgently, "Perrin, calling airlock control; Perrin, calling airlock control!"

A woman's voice answered, "Come in, Perrin." He told her what was wrong and added, "Send out Smythe to take this party back in. I'm staying. I want every ranger who's around and get me volunteers from among any of the experienced Moon hands. Send out a radio direction-finder by the first ones to leave."

We didn't wait long, for they came swarming toward us like grasshoppers. They must have been running forty or fifty miles an hour. It would have been something to see, if I hadn't been so sick at my stomach.

Dad put up an argument about going back, but Mr. Perrin shut him up. "If you hadn't been so confounded set on having your own way, we wouldn't be in a mess. If you had kept track of your kid, he wouldn't be lost. I've got kids of my own; I don't let 'em go out on the face of the Moon when they're too young to take care of themselves. You go on back - I can't be burdened by taking care of you, too."

I think Dad might even have gotten in a fight with him if Mother hadn't gotten faint again. We went on back with the party.

The next couple of hours were pretty awful. They let us sit just outside the control room where we could hear Mr. Perrin directing the search, over the loudspeaker. I thought at first that they would snag

the runt as soon as they started using the radio direction-finder-pick up his power hum, maybe, even if he didn't say anything-but no such luck; they didn't get anything with it. And the searchers didn't find anything either.

A thing that made it worse was that Mother and Dad didn't even try to blame me. Mother was crying quietly and Dad was consoling her, when he looked over at me with an odd expression. I guess he didn't really see me at all, but I thought he was thinking that if I hadn't insisted on going out on the surface this wouldn't have happened. I said, "Don't go looking at me, Dad. Nobody told me to keep an eye on him. I thought he was with Mother."

Dad just shook his head without answering. He was looking tired and sort of shrunk up. But Mother, instead of laying in to me and yelling, stopped her crying and managed to smile. "Come here, Dickie," she said, and put her other arm around me. "Nobody blames you, Dickie. Whatever happens, you weren't at fault. Remember that, Dickie."

So I let her kiss me and then sat with them for a while, but I felt worse than before. I kept thinking about the runt, somewhere out there, and his oxygen running out. Maybe it wasn't my fault, but I could have prevented it and I knew it. I shouldn't have depended on Mother to look out for him; she's no good at that sort of thing. She's the kind of person that would mislay her head if it wasn't knotted on tight - the ornamental sort. Mother's good, you understand, but she's not practical. She would take it pretty hard if the runt didn't come back. And so would Dad-and so would I. The runt is an awful nuisance, but it was going to seem strange not to have him around underfoot. I got to thinking about that remark, "Like a fish out of water." I accidentally busted an aquarium once; I remember yet how they looked. Not pretty. If the runt was going to die like that - I shut myself up and decided I just had to figure out some way to help find him.

After a while I had myself convinced that I could find him if they would just let me help look. But they wouldn't of course.

Dr. Evans the Director showed up again-he'd met us when we first came in - and asked if there was anything he could do for us and how was Mrs. Logan feeling? "You know I wouldn't have had this happen for the world," he added. "We're doing all we can. I'm having some ore-detectors shot over from Luna City. We might be able to spot the child by the metal in his suit."

Mother asked how about bloodhounds and Dr. Evans didn't even laugh at her. Dad suggested helicopters, then corrected himself and made it rockets. Dr. Evans pointed out that it was impossible to examine the ground closely from a rocket.

I got him aside presently and braced him to let me join the hunt. He was polite but unimpressed, so I insisted. "What makes you think you can find him?", he asked me. "We've got the most experienced Moon men available out there now. I'm afraid, son, that you would get yourself lost or hurt if you tried to keep up with them. In this country, if you once lose sight of landmarks, you can get hopelessly lost."

"But look, Doctor," I told him, "I know the runt-I mean my kid brother, better than anyone else in the world. I won't get lost-I mean I will get lost but just the way he did. You can send somebody to follow me."

He thought about it. "It's worth trying," he said suddenly. "I'll go with you. Let's suit up."

We made a fast trip out, taking thirty-foot strides-the best I could manage even with Dr. Evans hanging on to my belt to keep me from stumbling. Mr. Perrin was expecting us. He seemed dubious about my scheme. "Maybe the old 'lost mule' dodge will work," he admitted, "but I'll keep the regular search going just the same. Here, Shorty, take this flashlight. You'll need it in the shadows."

I stood on the edge of the crater and tried to imagine I was the runt, feeling bored and maybe a little bit griped at the lack of attention. What would I do next?

I went skipping down the slope, not going anywhere in particular, the way the runt would have done. Then I stopped and looked back, to see if Mother and Daddy and Dickie had noticed me. I was being followed all right; Dr. Evans and Mr. Perrin were close behind me. I pretended that no one was looking and went on. I was pretty close to the first rock outcroppings by now and I ducked behind the first one I came to. It wasn't high enough to hide me but it would have covered the runt. It felt like what he would do; he loved to play hide-and-go-seek - it made him the center of attention.

I thought about it. When the runt played that game, his notion of hiding was always to crawl under something, a bed, or a sofa, or an automobile, or even under the sink. I looked around. There were a lot of good places; the rocks were filled with blow holes and overhangs. I

started working them over. It seemed hopeless; there must have been a hundred such places right around close.

Mr. Perrin came up to me as I was crawling out of the fourth tight spot. "The men have shined flashlights around in every one of these places," he told me. "I don't think it's much use, Shorty."

"Okay," I said, but I kept at it. I knew I could get at spots a grown man couldn't reach; I just hoped the runt hadn't picked a spot I couldn't reach.

It went on and on and I was getting cold and stiff and terribly tired. The direct sunlight is hot on the Moon, but the second you get in the shade, it's cold. Down inside those rocks it never got warm at all. The suits they gave us tourists are well enough insulated, but the extra insulation is in the gloves and the boots and the seats of the pants-and I had been spending most of my time down on my stomach, wiggling into tight places.

I was so numb I could hardly move and my whole front felt icy. Besides, it gave me one more thing to worry about - how about the runt? Was he cold, too?

If it hadn't been for thinking how those fish looked and how, maybe, the runt would be frozen stiff before I could get to him, I would have quit. I was about beat. Besides, it's rather scary down inside those holes-you don't know what you'll come to next.

Dr. Evans took me by the arm as I came out of one of them, and touched his helmet to mine, so that I got his voice directly. "Might as well give up, son. You're knocking your self out and you haven't covered an acre." I pulled away from him.

The next place was a little overhang, not a foot off the ground. I flashed a light into it. It was empty and didn't seem to go anywhere. Then I saw there was a turn in it. I got down flat and wiggled in. The turn opened out a little and dropped off. I didn't think it was worthwhile to go any deeper as the runt wouldn't have crawled very far in the dark, but I scrunched ahead a little farther and flashed the light down.

I saw a boot sticking out.

That's about all there is to it. I nearly bashed in my helmet getting out of there, but I was dragging the runt after me. He was limp as a cat and his face was funny. Mr. Perrin and Dr. Evans were all over me

as I came out, pounding me on the back and shouting. "Is he dead, Mr. Perrin?" I asked, when I could get my breath. "He looks awful bad."

Mr. Perrin looked him over. "No . . . I can see a pulse in his throat. Shock and exposure, but this suit was specially built-we'll get him back fast." He picked the runt up in his arms and I took out after him.

Ten minutes later the runt was wrapped in blankets and drinking hot cocoa. I had some, too. Everybody was talking at once and Mother was crying again, but she looked normal and Dad had filled out.

He tried to write out a check for Mr. Perrin, but he brushed it off. "I don't need any reward; your boy found him.

"You can do me just one favor-"

"Yes?" Dad was all honey.

"Stay off the Moon. You don't belong here; you're not the pioneer type."

Dad took it. "I've already promised my wife that," he said without batting an eye. "You needn't worry."

I followed Mr. Perrin as he left and said to him privately, "Mr. Perrin-I just wanted to tell you that I'll be back, if you don't mind."

He shook hands with me and said, "I know you will, Shorty."